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# Exploring the role of mothers in ‘honour’ based abuse perpetration and the impact on the policing response

Rachael Aplin

## Highlights

- Mothers are the “driving force” in honour based abuse crime, perpetrating in 64% (49/76) of all cases involving women.
- Mothers inflict violence on pregnant daughters and induce abortion.
- Whether mothers are ‘perpetrators’ or secondary ‘victims’ acting under duress is explored.
- Police are influenced by victims who consider mothers as secondary victims.
- Police underreport female perpetration which adversely impacts on child safeguarding.

## Abstract

This article intends to illuminate the role played by mothers within ‘honour’ based abuse (HBA) crime, an issue that is both obscured and under researched. Findings are drawn from 100 HBA investigations (2012–2014) and fifteen semi structured interviews (2016) with specialist police officers in one UK police force.

The findings show that mothers play a fundamental, indeed “massive” role in perpetrating honour abuse against daughters. Mothers inflict violence, sometimes with an intention to induce an abortion; they inflict hard psychological abuse and condone the violence inflicted by other male relatives, mainly sons. This article challenges the ability for mothers to effectively safeguard child victims of HBA. Police under recording of female perpetration is apparent. Victim loyalty and reluctance to prosecute mothers contributes to the blurred of boundaries between mothers as ‘perpetrators’ and mothers as secondary ‘victims’ acting under duress. Such factors adversely affect the policing response.

## Keywords

Mothers; ‘honour’ based abuse; Violence; Induced abortion; Policing

## Introduction

There are no national or local statistics available to assess the scale of HBA in the UK, as no single crime of “honour based abuse” exists. HBA can encompass a variety of violent acts including murder, unexplained death/suicide, fear of or actual forced marriage, controlling sexual activity, domestic abuse, child abuse, rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment, threats to kill, assault, harassment and forced abortion (NPCC strategy, 2015:15). Although there are overlapping similarities between domestic abuse and HBA in terms of coercive control, there are notable features differentiating HBA from traditional constructs of violence against

women. HBA is condoned and supported by multiple family members, wherein decisions are made and facilitated by the collective. Such co-opting is not evident within 'traditional' crimes of domestic abuse (Chesler, 2009, Oberwittler and Kasselt, 2011 and Payton, 2011).

A substantial body of academic literature contends that HBA perpetrators are predominantly male (Belfrage et al., 2012, Chesler, 2010, Eisner and Ghuneim, 2013 and Welden, 2010) and typically the woman's blood relatives such as father, brother(s) and uncle(s) (Gill, 2013, Gill and Brah, 2014 and Jafri, 2009). Furthermore, HBA is unquestionably a gendered crime, with the majority of its victims being female (Gill, 2013 and Sen, 2005). This is due to the uneven power relations between men and women, with men enjoying a higher status within the family dynamic (Gangoli, Razak, and McCarry, 2006). Indeed, the current research findings support this contention<sup>1</sup> with women representing 96%<sup>2</sup> of the 100 victims. It must be acknowledged that because daughters are considered to be breaking social rules, victims are perceived by kin and community as responsible for their own victimisation (Jafri, 2009 and Welden, 2010), and thus paradoxically labelled as transgressors or "outsiders" (Balzani, 2011 and Becker, 2008).

Significantly, the role of women in 'policing' the behaviour of women, as well as the potential for female participation in violence or murder (Rew et al., 2013 and Sen, 2005) is a distinctive feature not identified in 'traditional' domestic abuse settings. Historically, honour based abuse research has focused on the extremes of honour killing rather than non-lethal violence towards women. It is considered that limited access to police data has precluded a detailed examination of the role that women play. Such limitations have led academics, such as Chesler, 2009 and Chesler, 2010 and Chesler and Bloom (2012), to use media reporting to progressively compile a 'jigsaw', piecing together modus operandi, victim and offender details in order to obtain a holistic international picture of behaviour(s). The involvement of the 'mother' in high profile UK murder cases, illustrated in the killings of Rukhsana Naz (1999) and Shafiea Ahmed (2003), the latter fully explored by Gill (2014), at least begins to unravel and acknowledge that female perpetration exists. Much research has been undertaken in relation to exploring the voices of South Asian women in the HBA sphere (Gill, 2004, Gill and Brah, 2014 and Sen, 2005). Yet such research implicitly accepts it is "usually men who carry out the violence" (Gill & Brah, 2014:75), despite some murders showing evidence to the contrary. Although HBA is a display of patriarchal power, it may be wrong to assume that women are incapable of displaying, reinforcing or aligning with that power. Many women when faced with criminal justice sanction, vindicate themselves by suggesting

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<sup>1</sup> The exception to this is Oberwittler and Kasselt's study of 78 honour killings in Germany (1996–2005) which found "unexpectedly high rates" of male victims- 43% (Oberwittler & Kasselt, 2011:1)

<sup>2</sup> In the other 4 cases of male victims, offending against males was either 'ancillary' to the key crime against their girlfriends or the offending was often diverted from males to their girlfriends. The current research supports Chesler's findings, that men are 'rarely' the sole target (Chesler, 2010:5; also Oberwittler & Kasselt, 2011: 3), and were attacked alongside female victims.

they are unable to defend and protect children due to the 'duress' and the violence they suffer at the hands of their husband. This was the prominent 11th hour ambush 'defence' utilised by Farzana Ahmed (8th July 2012) in the Shafilea Ahmed's murder trial. The mother entirely implicated husband Iftikar Ahmed in their daughter's murder. The defence sought to present the mother as a secondary victim, in that by trying to defend Shafilea from her husband's attack she was pushed away and punched with a clenched fist (Gill, 2014:187). Such a depiction not only conflicts with the antecedent history but is at odds with the testimony of daughter Alesha Ahmed, which instead exposes the mother as a willing participant and co-conspirator. The history of violence and psychological abuse inflicted by the mother highlights that she replicated many of the offending behaviours alluded to within this article; she physically attacked her daughter 'countless times'; she psychologically tormented her about an intended forced marriage in Pakistan; she locked her daughter in a bedroom for two days without food only letting her out to use the toilet. Moreover, the mother acted as key communicator to the authorities in 'justifying' Shafilea's bleach swallowing incident as 'accidental' (Gill & Brah, 2014:77). Both parents financially abused the victim, stealing £1000 from her part time work account. On the night of the murder, it was the mother who searched her bags, accused her of 'hiding' her earnings and pushed her on the settee, encouraging her husband to kill by saying in Punjabi "just finish it here" (Gill, 2014:186). Kandiyoti's research on the "patriarchal bargain" provides theoretical insight for such behaviours, by suggesting that in order to resist total male control, women become 'participants' with a vested interest in the system which oppresses them (Kandiyoti, 1988). Rather than resist and rebel, women negotiate within this confined and limited space, as a form of self-protection. This concept shall be explored further within the context of female perpetration. Although academics do confirm the tacit 'involvement' of women in honour based abuse (Balzani, 2011, Eisner and Ghuneim, 2013, Roberts, 2014 and Sen, 2005), such research does not delineate the particular dimensions and nature of abuse performed by women. The present study aims to expose the degree of participation and operational methods employed by female perpetrators, specifically mothers, within that unfolding crime.

Through the examination of the Aqsa Parvez (2007) case study, Welden suggests that the role of the mother within the family dynamic is "far smaller" in comparison to that of male family members, representing an indistinct, "nearly invisible," figure (Welden, 2010:389). In support of Ballard's research, this article challenges that proposition, arguing that mothers play a more active role within the family and within HBA crimes than previously considered. Although agreeably, women do not inflict violence on the same scale as male perpetrators, the findings demonstrate that women are capable of threatening and inflicting serious acts of violence within specific contexts. The idea that women perpetrate violence against other women causes significant "discomfort to feminists" as it erodes ideas of feminist solidarity (Rew et al., 2013:148). This could be why such a thorny issue has received scant attention

within domestic abuse literature. However, women are central to gender construction, and the role of mothers and women more generally is a “crucial area of future research” (Balzani, 2011:84).

## **Research methodology**

The main research comprised of a mixed method design, employed in order to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Cresswell, 2014). This article, however, focuses predominantly on qualitative data findings from 100 cases of honour based abuse incidents reported to police and drawn directly from police computer systems. It also relies on fifteen semi structured interviews from 14 detective police officers in specialist operational police protection investigation units (detective constables, sergeants and Inspectors) and one neighbourhood officer (constable). In order to distinguish between police data and police officers interviews, the former shall be referred to as a ‘case’ with a corresponding number (1–100) and the latter is referred to ‘interview’ followed by a letter.

The research strategy involved obtaining all (674) HBA cases reported to one police force between 2011 and 2014 (inclusive). Such incidents were specifically coded by the communications branch at the time of reporting. From this large sample, a stratified sample of 100 HBA cases (2012–2014) was chosen. In order to ensure this sample was ‘representative’, the researcher chose incidents across 11 divisional areas spanning the geographical force area. Examining 100 cases of honour based abuse is a multiple case sampling strategy. The researcher accessed and examined a host of related police electronic records in order obtain a holistic “richer picture” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008:72) of each case, using examples that are nestled within a real context that exude thick descriptions (Geertz, 1993) and have a strong impact on the reader. Such records comprised of the incident report, a running secondary investigation log of decisions and actions made by both uniform and specialist officers for example around suspect interviews, case conferences and strategy meetings with multi agencies, video interviews, issues with witnesses; DASH<sup>3</sup> risk assessment questionnaires exploring victims fears; intelligence and crime reports. The constant comparative method was applied in which the researcher compared data against data within and across 100 cases in order to improve the explanatory power of the concepts, termed the theoretical sampling of fresh contexts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this way an explanatory model of the behaviours of victims, perpetrators and the police was developed. A detailed thematic analysis was then undertaken to explore the recurring patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

The only qualifying criteria for interviewees were that officers must have strategic or operational involvement in honour abuse investigations. Eleven of the fifteen participants

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<sup>3</sup> Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessments

were female officers. Twelve participants were white British, with three of the participants of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indian heritage. The length of service for officers ranged from eight to 29 years, with the mean average being 15 years-service. Officers had a combined 228 years of policing experience. The semi structured interviews ranged in duration from 33 min to 1 hr 35 min.

The philosophical approach taken was that of symbolic interactionism, which focuses on understanding what people 'do' and the interactive processes that take place between and amongst actors (Blumer, 1969 and Charon, 2010; also Ritzer, 2008). Formal accounts of institutions seldom reflect the informal realities of the 'living world' of the institution (Atkinson & Housley, 2003:169). Such a method of examining documentary artefacts was chosen to avoid Goffman's "impression management," which could protect the interests of officers and police force reputation, rather than scratch beneath the veneer. Goffman (1990) suggests that individuals seek to project a socially acceptable idealised self-image. However, the aim was to unmask the backstage reality (Ritzer, 2008; also Punch, 2009) rather than advocate modified behaviour that projects an "acceptable face to outsiders" (Reiner & Newburn, 2008:355). The focus on the context, actions and decisions of actors means that the complexities and sometimes conflicting behaviours are fully exposed. The benefit is that such access to police data is ordinarily difficult, if not impossible, for academic 'outsiders' to obtain (Brown, 1996). A grounded theory inductive approach was applied in which the researcher remained 'close' and "grounded" to the data, verifying or refuting theories as details are extracted, at the production stage (Denscombe, 2007:99). Through the inductive approach, the researchers aim was to understand and interpret specific social situations, progressively building on and refining the theory (Bottoms, 2008 and Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It is contended that theories generated in this way tend to more cohesively "fit," as they are based on the behaviour or situations under study, which in turn provides greater credibility (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:32). The central aim of the research focused on organisational police culture and the application of discretionary practices at honour based abuse incidents. It was through the application of grounded theory that the iterative theme of female perpetration became apparent from the incident data.

The Chief Constable of the police force provided the consent to undertake the research. Due to the focus on police culture, the reputation of police forces was an important ethical consideration. Therefore a decision was taken to anonymise the police force. The exploration of computerised police incident data could be deemed as covert observation, particularly because those subjects being observed (victims, perpetrators, police officers and other public bodies) are unaware that their actions and decisions are being scrutinised without their consent. Yet it is precisely the analysis of such archived documents which is likely to accrue useful findings. Unobtrusive measures, that remove the researcher from 'direct observations or interactions' being studied (Denzin, 1989), are useful when

participants awareness of the investigation is likely to *affect* their responses. In order to protect the confidentiality of those sources, such archived data has been stringently edited, with names, locations, crime references, specific circumstances having been removed etc. In protecting the interests of victims and to avoid inadvertently contributing to the reinstatement of HBA, it is imperative that no link can be made between the data and victims/offenders of honour abuse.

## Results and discussion

The family origin of victims within the police incident data predominantly originate from South Asia. 62% were from Pakistan (62/100); 13% from Bangladesh (13/100) 8% from India (8/100) 5% were not specified (5/100), 3% were from Libya (3/100); 3% from Iraq (3/100); 2% from Somalia (2/100); 2% from Kurdistan (2/100); 1% Albanian speaking Macedonian (1/100); 1% white British (1/100).

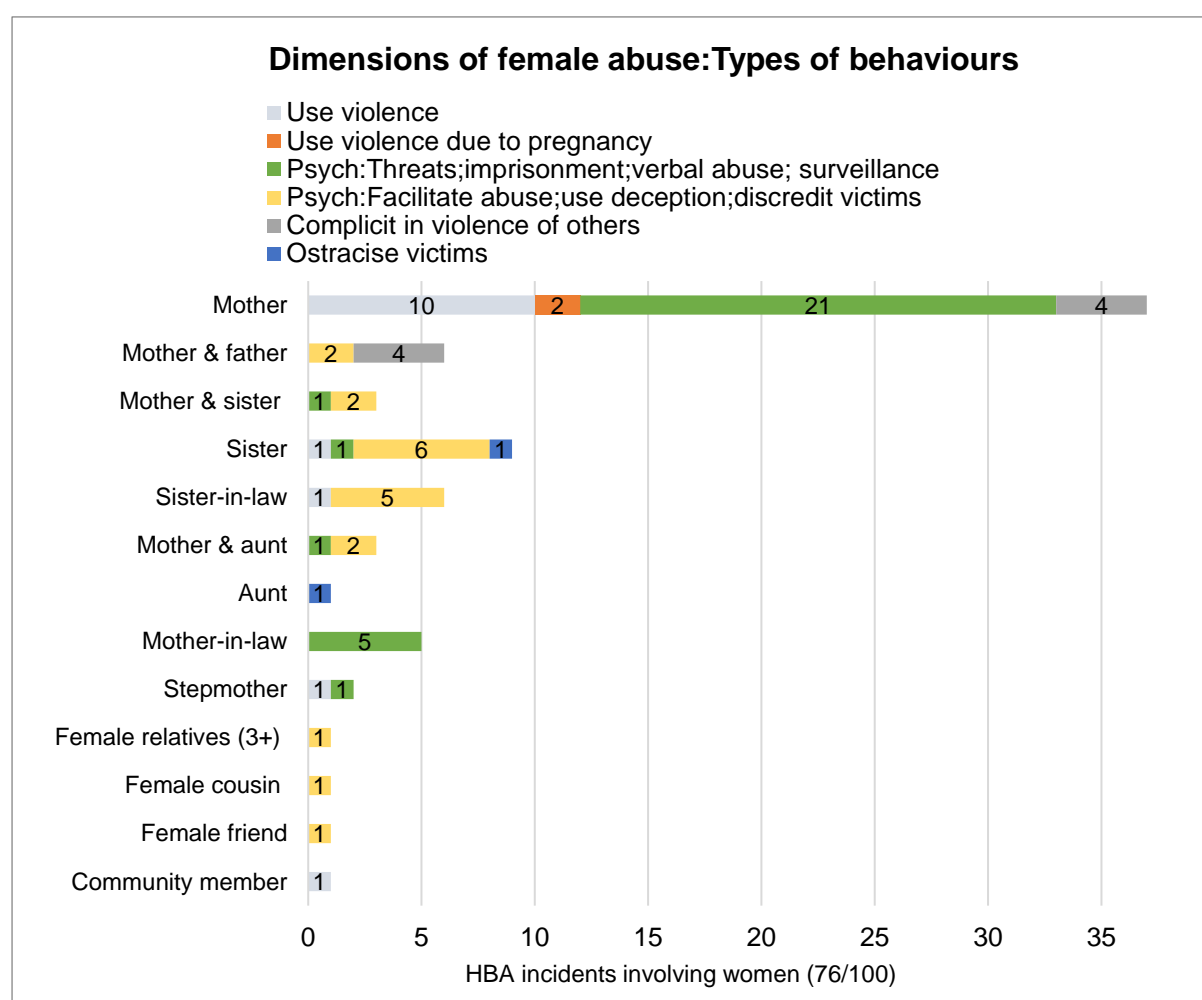
Of the 100 HBA investigations analysed, 76% of cases involved female perpetration of varying forms. Analytical findings from both data sets indicated a clustering of behaviours that females employed which were delineated into six key classifications, as shown in the chart below. The key categories include the physical violence inflicted by women; the infliction of violence due to victim pregnancy; the 'hard' 'psychological warfare' inflicted on victims, consisting of intrusive surveillance, dark threats, verbal derision, false imprisonment and emotional blackmail; that women employ a 'softer' psychological approach using emotive language, tears and/or deception to encourage fleeing women back to the fold; there was limited evidence of women offering support but then ostracising victims due to the pressure placed on them by patriarchs. Finally, women passively and complicity condoned the violence inflicted by others. Categorising the specific roles performed by perpetrators of *any* gender is problematic, since the incident data findings illustrated that 83% of honour abuse was inflicted by multiple perpetrators, each performing varying and often overlapping behaviours. Multiple perpetration not only highlights the collective nature of honour based abuse as a group activity but, like the existence of female perpetration, shows how this crime diverges from 'traditional' forms of domestic abuse.

Overwhelmingly, the largest proportion of female perpetrators in the incident data were mothers who acted either independently or in concert with male perpetrators (largely with sons and brothers) in 48% (37/76) of all cases involving women. In addition, mothers also acted in concert with husbands in 8% of cases (6/76), aunts (3/76) and daughters (3/76) in 4% of cases respectively. Mothers, therefore, cumulatively offended against daughters across the range of behaviours in 64% (49/76) of all female perpetration incidents. The highest proportion of female offenders after mothers was sisters, representing 9 of the 76 cases (12%). However, sisters also acted in concert with mothers and therefore cumulatively offended in 16% of cases (12/76). Other female perpetrators were the sister-in-law (6/76)

(8%), mother-in-law (5/76) (6.5%) and stepmother (2/76) (2%). To a lesser extent, there were negligible levels of abuse from multiple women acting in concert; a female friend; a community member; a female cousin and an aunt, all offending once within the sample respectively, aggregating to 6.5% (5/76). This article shall focus solely on the role of the mother in honour based abuse.

The chart highlights the prevalent role of mothers who perpetrated abuse across a range of behaviours, notably inflicting physical violence (10/14), they were the only offenders to assault daughters *because* they were pregnant (2/2). Mothers also meted out ‘hard’ psychological abuse (23/30), and were complicit in condoning violence inflicted largely by sons and also uncles (8/8).

**Chart 1: Dimensions of female abuse: Types of behaviours**



Interviews with specialist officers, by comparison, provided a mixed picture concerning recognition of female perpetration. The only question posed to officers on this subject was what role, if any, *women* played in perpetration of honour based abuse. In line with the incident findings, the majority of discussions were fixed on the involvement of ‘mothers’



against daughters rather than other women, highlighting the centrality of ‘mothers’ as perpetrators. Almost half the officers interviewed (7/15) (47%) (**interviews a, b, c, d, g, f and h**) acknowledged that women played a “large” (**interview g**) indeed “massive” role (**interviews a, c, d**) in HBA perpetration. Two interviewees went further in suggesting that women were the “driving force” behind HBA (**interview f and h**) with a further officer stating “it’s just as bad from the women” (**interview b**). Conversely, despite investigating HBA cases within the department, a third of specialist officers (5/15) (33%) had never investigated a case of female perpetration (**interviews e, i, l, n and o**).

Along with exploring the four key behaviours of mothers who perpetrate HBA, this article shall also consider the victims unwavering loyalty towards mothers, combined with the contradictory behaviours of mothers towards their daughters. Are mothers ‘perpetrators’ or secondary ‘victims’ acting under duress? The stereotyping of HBA perpetrators by police officers and under recording crimes committed by mothers shall also be assessed. Reluctance by daughters to implicate mothers to the police appears to exacerbate this lack of recognition of female perpetration, and in turn adversely impacts on the effectiveness of child safeguarding provision.

### Exploring violence by mothers

Direct violence by women was relatively rare across the findings, representing only 18.5% (14/76) of all the behaviours by women. However, crucially, mothers inflicted 71.5% (10/14) of all the direct acts of violence against daughters (**case, 10, 13, 17, 20, 26, 39, 61, 72, 84, 93**). Daughters were attacked by mothers (and other females) in a variety of ways, by pulling their hair (**case 39, 93**) in some cases cutting off their hair (**interview m, case 54**); being slapped (**61, 72, 20**); being “hit” across the face and elsewhere (**cases 26 and 13**) being punched (**cases 39, 93**) and kicked (**case 93**). Mothers also used household objects to assault daughters with, such as a Hoover pipe (**case 20**), the metal frame of a bed (**case 93**), mothers threw “chairs and shoes” (**case 17**) or slapped children on the head with slippers (**case 84**). In one case a 14-year-old child was tied to a chair and systematically assaulted, having her hair cut off by both mother and grandmother because she went missing from home (MFH) and was found in the park. The intention was to:

Stop her becoming wayward, they thought that she was going to get a boyfriend, she was going to drop out of further education; she was generally becoming more westernised, shall we say, than they wanted her to be... She had been the victim of assaults and false imprisonments, shackled to chairs, and things like that- having her hair cut off- to make her less attractive and less likely to go out (**interview m**).

Sometimes, there appeared to be no real ‘justification’ for the infliction of violence by mothers. A 12-year-old Bangladeshi child divulged to officers that her mother punched her five times and pulled her hair because she “wouldn’t pick something up off the bedroom floor

because she [the victim] was tired” (**case 39**). In another case a vulnerable victim with learning difficulties was “slapped” by her mother “for not listening” (**case 61**). Mothers not only use violence, but condone the cruelty and ill-treatment of the ‘perceived’ transgressor by bullying and encouraging others to injure the victim. One officer spoke of a case where the child was chatting to a boy on Facebook, her sister found out and assaulted her, then her mum assaulted her, and then her brother hit her (**interview k**). In another case a 14-year-old victim attested that the mother had locked herself in a bedroom in order to monitor her daughter's Facebook pages. A fight ensued whereby the mother jumped on top of the child and started to bang the victim's head against the metal frame of the bed. In an attempt to stop the violence the child ‘bit’ her mother on the hand. During the attack, the younger sister contributed by pulling the victim's hair. Later that day the younger sibling came into the kitchen and began to tease the victim with food, to which the mother said “let her starve” (**case 93**). These cases not only illustrate isolated acts of violence, but moreover expose evidence of relentless bullying by the wider collective, with relatives colluding and encouraging each other to perform violent acts. This targeted and unrelenting ‘bullying’ appears highly reminiscent of Gill's evaluation of the Shafiea Ahmed case, in which the daughter was targeted for “the most trifling reasons” (Gill, 2014:185).

### Inducing and encouraging abortion

Across the 100 cases, 10% revealed pregnancy outside marriage was a key trigger precipitating HBA (**cases 5, 65, 67, 69, 70, 83, 87, 89, 95, 100**), which was an unexpected finding.

The cases revolved around young Asian females ‘defying’ the family by having illicit relationships with ‘disapproved of’ men and becoming pregnant. The perceived remedy for dishonouring the family was that victims were “forced to have an abortion,” involving close liaison with community and family to ensure “the desired result was achieved” (**case 83**). Findings showed that in the five pregnancy cases where violence was threatened, two cases involved direct violence by mothers (**case 95, 87**). In the first case, unveiling the pregnancy was entirely engineered by the sister-in-law, who transported the unaware victim and her boyfriend to the parents address. On realising the deception, the boyfriend took the first train back home, leaving his girlfriend at the mercy of her mother, who on hearing news of the 5 month pregnancy hit and kicked her to the stomach “knowing full well she was pregnant”. The mother set about verbally demeaning her as:

Dirty... no longer part of the family, they all wished she was dead, they hope she dies, they hope her child is born disabled and that she is going to be kicked out of the family home with only the clothes she was wearing (**case 95**).

In a second almost identical case, a mother was encouraged by a female cousin and consequently slapped her pregnant daughter twice in the hip, rather than the stomach,

because the victim had taken evasive action by moving out of the way. The victim firmly believed the “mother was trying to hit her in the stomach to cause harm to her unborn baby” (**case 87**). Mothers in these two cases appear to act with an almost unnatural abhorrence towards their daughters, inflicting violence that constitutes nothing less than attempt to induce an abortion<sup>4</sup>. The concern around believing that mothers unequivocally protect their offspring within an honour context has adverse consequences for victims. This is particularly apparent when observing the responses to HBA by public bodies, who often appear to accept this assumption. In one case (**linked cases 65 and 67**), the police were warned by the boyfriend that the family may:

Either throw [the pregnant victim] her down the stairs or force her to have an abortion and say that she consented (**case 65**).

The victim also confirmed to the attendant officer:

If she did have an abortion it would be because her family had made her (**case 65**).

Yet the attendant officer took no proactive steps to safeguard her. The family successfully managed to dupe the police into accepting that the boyfriend was the perpetrator and the parents instead were acting in the victim's ‘best interests.’ The police proceeded to provide the family with advice on harassment (by the boyfriend) and very tactfully advised them about the offence of false imprisonment. Ten days later, in a separate police report, the boyfriend again alerted the police that the victim needed help escaping the family home (**case 67**). She had been locked in the home by her mother and sister and the property was secured behind an electric gate. Consequently the police had trouble effecting entry. The victim was no longer pregnant and disclosed to officers that she had a “miscarriage” six days after police attendance where she was “taken to a (named) private clinic.” This is not further probed by police officers. Although foul play and assault regarding the victim cannot be confirmed, it is suggested this is indicative of the victim having been psychologically ‘worn down’ into aborting a baby. This tends to be corroborated by the victim account to officers in the ‘write up’:

She will get married without her friends or family present if that's the way it has to be. I've asked what the rush is and she told me it's because in Islam you're not supposed to have sexual relations with anyone and aren't really meant to live or be together. By them having sex and being together they commit sins every day. By being pregnant it was a sin and she doesn't want to sin anymore. Boyfriend is her first boyfriend-and believes he is ‘the one’ (**case 67**).

Other examples indicate that there may be a clear rationale behind mothers putting a stop to unplanned pregnancies. This is exemplified when a seven month pregnant 16-year-old was pre-warned by her mother of a plan that she would be killed by a third party at the instigation

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<sup>4</sup> This is distinct from a miscarriage which connotes a spontaneous or natural loss of the foetus.

of her father and brother. The younger brother alerted his mother that the father was on route to Pakistan to kill her (his wife) too, and, as a result 'Osman warnings'<sup>5</sup> were issued by the police, reflecting a clear threat to life for both the mother and pregnant daughter (**linked case 69, 70**). This example supports Van Eck's proposition that women who fail to keep others 'in line' can end up being "tarred with the same brush" (2003 as cited in Cooney, 2014:417). Prior research suggests that, in collectivist societies, the woman's family of origin, as well as the victim herself are blamed for her perceived dishonourable behaviour (Chesler and Bloom, 2012 and Haj-Yahia, 2011). The failure to educate and prepare daughters can increase the mothers risk of being killed (Cooney, 2014). Broken taboos can affect the family and spread like 'contagion' (Douglas, 2008 and Jafri, 2009) affecting other female siblings, who received the same upbringing (Haj-Yahia, 2011). Reflecting on such cultural norms, it becomes more comprehensible to rationalise why women play a role in the promotion of family honour (Ballard, 1982 and Balzani, 2011). Women may be concerned not only to fulfil their culturally prescribed gender roles, but to safeguard their personal and familial reputations (Osterman and Brown, 2011). It is plausible to suggest therefore, that women encourage, condone or commit violence due to self-preservation and a fear of losing reputation which may destabilise their own vulnerable position.

Conversely, there was *no* evidence across the 100 incident data cases or within the semi structured interviews of any intentional violence by men towards pregnant women with intent to kill the unborn child<sup>6</sup>. In the five remaining pregnancy cases, one girl gave birth and the child was immediately placed in local authority care. She became pregnant again soon after and, like her sister, remained at risk of sexual exploitation (**cases 69 and 70**); one pregnant female was sent to Pakistan after being given a veiled threat that her father will "give her what she deserves" (**case 5**). In a further two cases, pregnant victims returned to the risk situation, hoping to be supported by their mother (**case 83 and 89**). Only two police interviewees alluded to the pregnancy theme. However the narrative was equally poignant and disturbing, and again mothers were the central feature of the narrative:

You get pregnant, if you get pregnant in those communities –we talked about that example where Mum's 'kicked the shit' out of her daughter – excuse my language – that's how it is. I am 52 now and I do not know one Asian girl in

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<sup>5</sup> An 'Osman warning' is given by police officers to intended victims to warn them of a threat to their life. This is derived from the case of *R v Osman* 2000 in which the ECHR ruled that public bodies, such as the police are under a positive obligation to take preventative operational measures to protect an individual when there is real and immediate risk to life from the criminal acts of others. The Osman family appealed to the ECHR after one of their family was killed, arguing that the police owed a duty of care to the victim, that police should have taken steps to safeguard the victim and should not hold immunity from prosecution (Donald, Mottershaw, and Leach, 2009 Equality and Human rights commission).

<sup>6</sup> There was only one case where the husband slapped his 4 month pregnant wife across the face 3 or 4 times causing swelling and bruising to the eye after a row instigated by his family (**case 9**). However, this is differentiated from preceding cases, as the *pregnancy* itself was not the trigger for the HBA and there was also no intent to harm the unborn child.

my whole surroundings, cousins, families, friends, who has got pregnant [out of marriage] because that would be the worst thing you could do – even worse than having a cig or going out with a boy from the wrong culture (interview a).

One officer dealt with a particularly harrowing case in which a Sikh girl became pregnant to her Muslim boyfriend. She was found lying unconscious in the road having been physically beaten. Investigators found an imprint of a ceremonial sword permanently burnt into her back:

She were lay in the road, she was unconscious and she had-it was quite horrific actually I remember it now, she had quite a lot of injuries, she had the imprint of a ceremonial sword on her back, that had been burnt onto her back... But mum seemed to be very much the driving force behind that- and I think mums have a very, very big part to play in it and I think-much as there are issues around strength and isolation with Asian females I think that they do still have quite control, a matriarchal control on households (interview h).

As a result of the attack, the victim lost her unborn child and was so badly injured she was left permanently physically disabled. The police were unable to prove the family had inflicted the extensive injuries. Despite this, the investigating officer believes in her “heart of hearts” that the family, who ironically still ‘care’ for her, are the perpetrators. Consequently she considers that women particularly are “the key to ending any form of honour based abuse” (interview h).

### The ‘hard’ psychological approach

Psychological control is categorised under direct threats, verbal abuse, false imprisonment (albeit this is a ‘crime’ in itself), intrusive surveillance, and the victim suffering labour servitude or being treated as a ‘slave’. These essentially revolve around ‘policing’ and tight surveillance behaviours, imprisoning the victim so she feels a “prisoner in her own home” (case 28); prohibiting and punishing victims for wearing make-up or wearing westernised clothes; searching victims' bags; predominantly confiscating items such as bank cards, bus passes, passports, mobile phones, or alternatively ‘monitoring’ ipads and phone calls; prohibiting access social media sites, such as Facebook (cases 7, 9,13,17,20,21, 22, 28, 30, 32,33,34,37, 39,41,44, 45, 48, 49, 54,55, 56, 57, 58, 61, 65, 67, 71, 72, 74, 75, 79, 84, 86, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94 and 96). As Chart 1 indicates, the largest proportion of ‘hard’ psychological abuse inflicted by female perpetrators was overwhelmingly inflicted by mothers in 70% of all cases (21/30); however mothers also offended in conjunction with aunts and sisters in 6.5% of cases (2/30), meaning cumulatively mothers were responsible for hard psychological abuse in 77% (23/30) of cases. The mother-in-law offended in 16.5% of cases (5/30) and a stepmother and sister in one case respectively 7% (2/30). There were

22 child victims<sup>7</sup> within the incident data (22/100) and many of these behaviours illustrated stifling and “extreme levels” (**case 17**) of control largely by mothers against children:

Mother has also taken her mobile phone off her, reducing any influence she feels is negative. Her Mother has stated that (relatives) will break her legs, making it look like she has fallen down the stairs<sup>8</sup> and this will reduce the amount of time she spends out of the address (**case 22**).

Her parents are very controlling, in particular her mother. They do not allow her to westernise and her mum watches her every move and is obsessively controlling. (Victim) wants freedom to do what she wants - but is never allowed (**case 17**).

A mother took her passport and bank card off her, “smashed her phone up and would not allow her to go on the internet in case she contacted an ex-partner of hers”. Mother and siblings followed the victim to a supermarket then forced her to get into their car and took her home and locked her in the house (**case 61**).

In another case an Indian mother, described as “quite controlling of late, doing more snooping,” had found an abortion leaflet whilst rifling her daughter’s bag. The six weeks pregnant daughter feared the “mother and family would beat her if the truth about her pregnancy outside of marriage comes out” (**case 89**).

It was only after spending eighteen months in care that one victim finally disclosed it was the mother who generated and sustained the “psychological warfare” (**interview d**):

Mum is the biggest offender in this victim's eyes. Dad is very fluid. Dad is saying “Look, whatever the girl wants. If she wants to come home, if she wants to go to college. We want her to do well”...when she came out, she ended up going to college, she opened up and she's basically saying “Yes, my mum just basically controlled everything I did, everywhere I went, what I wore, what my room looked like. She suspected I had a boyfriend, so my restriction to freedom” (**interview d**).

Children are often threatened with harsh ultimatums, that daughters will be “dead to them” (**case 53, 95, 96**) that they will be “thrown out” (**case 11**) or “cut off” (**case 33, 77, 93**) if they fail to comply with a marriage or refuse to stop relationship with a boyfriend. Female (and male) perpetrators often threaten to kill themselves if victims refuse to comply with family demands (**cases 86, 77, 90, 46**). Mothers are particularly effective in communicating particularly harsh and acidic commentary, several wishing death upon daughters if they did not comply with family wishes:

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<sup>7</sup> Offences of HBA against 'children' are legally defined as those victims aged under 18 years (The Children's Act 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Such findings not only show women's involvement in HBA, but support the contention that there may be a “substantial number” of honour killings “disguised as accidents or suicides” (Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013:406). Similarly, Swedish academics allude to reported cases of young girls having ‘committed suicide’ in dubious circumstances, such as having ‘fallen’ from a balcony (Belfrage et al., 2012).

My mum said a long time ago women used to have babies, find out it's a girl and kill them after being born. She said that's what should have happened to me. She said she didn't care about me and she wanted me dead because of all the stress I gave her (**case 96**).

Mother told victim: "I'll just get you married to one of your cousins. If anything happens I'll just hope you die and if you don't die I will just kill you myself and there will be a funeral for you" (**case 64**).

Another mother threatened that if she refused to marry a cousin in Pakistan she "would be dead to them and they would never speak to her again" (**case 53**).

They would both be (Mum and daughter) "caste out of their community if (she) left home" and she was also "threatening to commit suicide if (she) left" (**case 86**).

If she does not (marry) then she will bring shame on the family and she will be killed (**case 81**).

Victim said she was "forced into the marriage by mum saying that if you don't get married you'll bring shame upon the family/us, the family will get assaulted (things like that) because of you". So she felt like she had no choice but to go through with this marriage (**interview c**).

It is argued that such psychological abuse is debilitating for victims, especially children; and contributes to their reluctance in divulging the full nature of abuse to police officers.

### **A victims unwavering loyalty to mother**

The way mothers present themselves, both to their daughters and to police officers, leads to the belief that mothers are 'secondary' or indirect victims. Findings from both data sets indicate that victims are often reluctant to divulge violence or psychological abuse inflicted by the mother due to an abiding sense of loyalty around getting "mum into trouble" (**cases 10, 17, 87, 67**). Despite evidence of very controlling and oppressive behaviours by women, victims paradoxically possess unwavering trust in mothers believing that mothers will protect them from the wrath of fathers, in terms of hiding discreditable or shaming behaviour, such as knowledge around 'secret' boyfriends (**interview d**); or when caught 'sneaking out' of the house at 1 am, one daughter was convinced the father was "unaware" (**case 62**). Another mother intercepted a letter from her daughter's lover, but the victim remained adamant "she doesn't believe her mother will tell dad any of this" (**case 6**). Victims possess a naïve and misguided belief that mothers pose no risk and that they will continue to protect her best interests, even when victims have already had their trust shattered. This implicit trust appears tied to a vain hope that mum will "eventually support her" (**case 87**) regarding her chosen boyfriend, even when this seems unlikely to an objective outsider. Against their own

best interests, daughters often acquiesce to perpetrator demands, seemingly out of love and loyalty to the mother. One female presented to officers as if she had mental health issues, she would draw injuries on herself, but this was deemed by the officer as a “desperate act.”

This girl presented to officers as almost as though she was barking, as if he was crazy. She wasn't. CAAMHS tell you that she wasn't...//.., it's difficult when victims are not sharing everything that they should be sharing...//.. this girl found it very, very difficult. She never betrayed her mum...//.. She said “Yes, my mum just basically controlled everything I did, and I was doing things that I didn't like just to keep her on side, just to see her happy, just to see her smile” but she was living a life that she did not want to live (**interview d**).

There also appears to be inherent contradictions in the behaviours of mothers towards daughters in the context of honour abuse. For instance, one victim spoke tearfully to the police of her father beating her mother in Macedonia when they were children. Yet it was paradoxically the *mother* who demanded that her daughter marry a suitor in Macedonia to reduce the embarrassment of the family (**case 58**). Despite apparently contradictory, seemingly dysfunctional behaviours of mothers, daughters tend to view mothers in a favourable light:

Her mum told her that ‘she had to marry this male’ but recently she has gone back on this with mother stating ‘she only wants (victim) to do whatever makes her happy’ (**case 61**).

Her mum is on her side but she slapped her the other week (**case 72**).

Despite being duped twice by her mother into returning home, one victim still retained faith in the mother. When she returned home a *third* time the mother reacts differently, supporting her escape from the address, exhibiting what could be deemed as guilt and regret:

Her mother gave her a phone and told her to run away, which she did, and apologised for allowing the marriage (**case 72**).

Certainly when analysed alongside the psychological abuse discourse, these could be considered as deceptive ploys to retain victims within the family circle in order to slowly resume the cycle of abuse. Yet moreover, the ambivalent and essentially contradictory attitudes of mothers in these examples, appears to reflect the “coping mechanisms” women are obligated to perform (Kandiyoti, 1988:285). These conflicting excerpts reflect inner turmoil, with mothers appearing to accommodate and adhere to the ‘patriarchal bargain’ in one instance by punishing wayward daughters, then ‘resisting’ these obligations out of love and loyalty the next, strategizing within their limited constraints.



## Turning a “blind eye” and condoning abuse: failure to safeguard

Safeguarding is an important element when considering alongside mothers who perpetrate, as almost a quarter of victims (22%) were children (22/100). Findings within the police data and officer interviews suggested that mothers “turn a blind eye” to offending and are forcibly obligated to conform and “accept” social norms:

There is probably an element where they encourage it or whether they acquiesce to it you know. I don't know-the accepting of it (**interview p**).

It's kind of like a ‘wilful blindness’ with some mothers (**interview f**).

Not necessarily committing the abuse themselves but knowing about it and saying or doing nothing. Being on the periphery to the point where they're either covering or trying to mediate, or acceptance of it (**interview e**).

### So have mums been condoning activity?

Potentially, yes. Or turning a blind eye (**interview e**).

Bound up within this discourse on condoning violence was the notion, explicit from some interviewees that mothers are a ‘secondary’ or “indirect victim” (**interview g**), acting under a patriarchal pressure or ‘duress,’ “because that's what you have to do” (**interview e**), rather than being clearly perceived and defined as a ‘perpetrator’:

Sometimes you [the mother] are doing it because you *have to* do it - and you are doing it because if you don't do it these are the ramifications. But other times I think they actually do it because they feel that that is their *role* to do it (**interview a**).

So I believe that Mums - and they are often told to do it by the father. Cause the father's like-“I go out, I am the breadwinner, you are the mother who looks after the children-you bring her up right. You get her ready for marriage” (**interview a**).

Even if they wanted to help their child it's very difficult because they themselves can be a HBA victim. It's not direct – it's indirect because, if .....for example a mother was trying to help her daughter not go through a FM- threats of HBA can come from her husband or extended family-not just to the victim-but the mother as well. Sometimes I think....they are oppressed-pressured into complying with it (**interview g**).

Because they are being made to do it as well, they will be giving the advice that the males want the females to give, rather than the advice that they actually believe in. So, the younger kids are listening to that from the older females thinking “Oh well, it must be right then, so I'll have to go along with it” (**interview c**).

The incident data findings revealed mothers, personally condoned violence inflicted by sons (**cases 68, 50**); and in concert with fathers were complicit in a son's violence (**case 32, 71, 94, 96**). Mothers also condoned their own brother's violence to their daughter (**cases 21, 43**).

One 16-year-old victim under a child protection plan for physical abuse due to relentless violence from her brother was kidnapped by him after a late night out and was subjected to punches to the head. The attack continued next morning in the mother's presence, where he began kicking her in the head; "eventually their mother told the son to stop, but he didn't" (**case 96 also linked to 94 and 32**). Longitudinal analysis of this victim highlighted that it took eighteen months and eight police reports (May 2011–Nov. 2012) with officers invoking 72 hr police protection plans and social services returning the victim to a risk environment, for children's social care to eventually place her in long term foster care. It was a 'dawning' rather than an immediate realisation that the mother rather than nurturing and protecting her daughter, was condoning and facilitating the abuse. In a similar case, a 15-year-old victim was slapped, kicked and punched by her authoritarian brother for having innocent content on Facebook and returning home late from school. Again, the mother was present when some of the assaults took place (**case 50**). In another case a teenager was dragged down the stairs by her hair by the uncle, who then threatened her with a knife should she go missing from home again. The mother, present at the time of the incident tried to reassure the victim by hugging her and telling the uncle to "go". The Police assessment of the incident highlights the difficulty in establishing whether the mother was a 'victim' or 'perpetrator':

The mother is either assisting uncle or is in fear of reprisals from other family members (**case 43**).

Despite clumps of the victims' hair being located around the house by officers, both the mother and elder sister colluded and closed ranks when police officers attended, denying the uncle was even at the address. The mother refused to allow the siblings to be video interviewed and consequently a prosecution case could not be established. It could be argued that rather than signifying a 'frightened' mother, this draconian treatment by the uncle was a choreographed 'performance', engineered by both the mother and uncle in order to teach the daughter a lesson and encourage future compliant behaviour. Equally, this is a mother seemingly torn between her obligation to the social norms of the 'collective' and the instinct to protect her daughter. This is indeed a hard bargain.

The passive condoning of violence by mothers has particular ramifications. Firstly it highlights the neglect posed by women, particularly mothers, in their failure to safeguard and protect children from significant harm. Secondly, these extracts highlight the difficulty for officers, and possibly other public bodies, in differentiating between the mother as a secondary 'victim' in HBA cases, to those who consider her as an equally culpable 'villain' who fails to protect. It is considered that this may help to explain why female perpetration is

largely unrecognised and why males are often arrested and processed as offenders, often when it is clear that women are demarcated as offenders. Thirdly, it raises important questions about how public bodies effectively screen and risk assess the appropriateness of relatives in safeguarding children, particularly because, as wider findings indicate, children may not necessarily be placed in care, but may be returned either back home or sent to live with other relatives. Professionals accepting that relatives, including mothers, are automatically 'sympathetic' to victims, rather than aligning with perpetrators, is a dangerous presumption to make. But the notion that mother 'protect' is apparent, particularly reflected in the fact that 59% of child victims who alleged perpetration of honour abuse by their parents were reconciled back home by children's social care to those abusers. This appears to have adverse outcomes for child victims who appear to be under-protected by the state.

### **Police stereotype and underreport female perpetration**

An exacerbating feature of female perpetration appears to be the inability by some uniformed police officers to recognise 'mothers,' and women more generally, as perpetrators of HBA crimes.

Despite police incident reports directly implicating *mothers* in violence (solely or with others), uniformed officers did not place mothers as perpetrators on police computer systems (PPI) or within formalised crime reports in 12% of cases (**cases 12, 13, 17, 26, 27, 44, 58, 62, 64, 84, 87 and 89**). Instead fathers were often logged as perpetrators and/or arrested, sometimes based on little to no evidence. In one case despite only the mother being implicated in the violence by throwing shoes and chairs at the victim, surprisingly only the father is named as key perpetrator in the crime report (**case 17**). In a different case, despite both parents being implicated in slapping their 15-year-old daughter, *only* the father was arrested (**case 26**). This difficulty in police categorising the mother as 'perpetrator' is evident in a case where a mother had argued with her female child and then hit her with a slipper. Despite this, only the father was placed on the police nominal as 'perpetrator'. Within the incident report it was rationalised by the victim that:

Mother always obeys her father's instruction and that she [the mother] has fallen out with her family members [abroad] and they do not have any contact (**case 84**).

The uniformed officers 'write up' tends to portray the mother as much of a 'victim' as the daughter, 'oppressed' under a patriarchal regime and committing acts of violence out of duress to satisfy the demands of her husband. This police response, at face value, tends to support the feminist perspective, that women are coerced into violence by men, rather than acting out of individual agency. It is argued that, in part, officers are unduly influenced by perpetrator's perspectives, and this in turn impacts on whether the officer differentiates the 'victim' from the 'villain'. Certainly from the police interviews, there appears to be a sense in

which specialised officers view uniformed staff as having generalised stereotypical assumptions that women are 'victims' and men are 'offenders':

I think Dad is always made out to be the one who's the main person to be concerned about (**interview n**).

You can tell that by the way that we all speak [police] - because the perpetrator will always be called "he" and the victim will always be "she"... because we're going off numbers aren't we -you'll deal with 10-(males) to everyone (female) and unfortunately it can sway what you say. I think we are getting better, just to be open to the investigation mind-set of- 'who was responsible for this'- rather than thinking it must be Dad (**interview m**).

A lot of the focus is on the male relatives whether it be fathers, uncles, brothers, etc (**interview p**).

However there was recognition from specialist officers not only that men did not always offend, but that they performed a protective function. For instance, one mother sent her 17 year old daughter off to Pakistan in order to marry her cousin. However because the daughter did not consent to this, it was the uncle, rather than the mother who halted the wedding plans as he was not prepared to force this situation on either his niece or his son (**interview b**):

Sometimes the partners may disagree – the actual father may disagree.... (**interview a**).

My dad wasn't really that bothered. I think if he knew I think he would have just said "Look, you know, don't let other people know"-but it was *mum* (**interview d**).

There is an acceptance amongst officers that female perpetration is overlooked, due to the subjective social constructions that society makes about how women and men 'should' behave, rather than recognising the reality of those interactions. It was only through observing a DVD on child genital mutilation training that one officer's paradigm shifted entirely, which led to a re-evaluation of the role women play in honour abuse:

It was a mum that was pinning the kids down and I'll never forget that and I heard the children screaming and mum's pinning them down while they're doing it. That's what's opened my eyes really as to any future jobs that I might attend...mum would be somebody that I would definitely ask a few more questions about...Because normally you would think that mum is this nice person who does all the cooking and has the family kind of organised and does everything, but mum I think in a lot of cases probably does play a lot more of an active role than is ever disclosed really (**interview n**).

I think sometimes people forget to look...I think sometimes they [women] are overlooked as being a bigger part of it as they should be (**interview p**).

I think sometimes we're [police] a bit stereotypical and we see it as the male as being the perpetrator and not just in the honour based stuff as well. You could have somebody who's rung the police and it could be a male victim who's covered in blood, you get there; male and female, female's the first person who will say "well he assaulted me" and then they end up locking the male up and then it's then established then actually, no, she's the perpetrator because she stabbed me for x, y & z. Again I think we are stereotypical in that way where we see it as a male dominant issue but it's not, it's not gender specific it should be anybody's responsible (**interview k**).

## Conclusions

The introduction of quantitative data across 100 cases, illustrates the dominant role played by mothers in HBA crime, especially when compared to other female relatives such as the mother-in-law. The findings showed that mothers are more likely than men, in situations of illegitimate pregnancy, to resort to serious acts of violence. One could argue that this occurs because mothers are more likely to be held directly accountable for the shameful behaviour of their daughters. However, there was only evidence in three cases (3/100) that the mother's safety was jeopardised by the wayward behaviour of the daughter. Similarly, there was only one instance (1/100) where a mother actively protected her children by ousting the perpetrating father from the family home. By comparison there was overwhelming evidence of abhorrent behaviours by mothers towards children in inflicting violence, condoning violence, deceiving and denigrating daughters, ostracising them from kin, bartering to sell them, wishing them "dead," threatening to kill them or throw them downstairs. Such findings are hard to reconcile with notions of women as hapless or "passive victims" (Yuval Davis, 1998:31). Numerous extracts illustrate that women initiate violence towards their daughters without the pressurising presence of men (Rew et al., 2013:154), to a degree highlighting the inadequacy of the duress argument. However, it is too simplistic to suggest that the attitudes and behaviours of female perpetrators are independent 'rational choices' somehow 'separate' from patriarchy. Such subordination to social norms subconsciously permeates the context of a woman's early socialisation (Kandiyoti, 1988:285). The findings illustrate that mothers, in many instances, appear to 'sacrifice' daughters because conforming to such social norms affords women greater protection, security and stability (ibid). It is not in a mother's best interests to subvert the gender order by behaving otherwise. Therefore the infliction of HBA by women is not solely about fulfilling duty and cultural obligation, but is enacted to preserve the self-interest and reputation of woman, who have become "experts in maximising their own life chances" (Kandiyoti, 1988:280). This could be interpreted as 'saving one's own skin'. Furthermore, the findings support the view from interviewees that mothers are the "driving force" and integral to "ending honour abuse," indicating that governmental policy should focus on women, rather than solely on male perpetration.

Officers appear to be influenced by gender role expectations, with officers possessing stereotypical views of mothers as 'non-criminal,' nurturing and supportive. Where there

appeared to be a blurred distinction between mothers as controlling 'perpetrators' and mothers as oppressed 'victims' - there existed a difficulty in professionals 'labelling' (on PPI and crime reports) females as 'perpetrators.' However, equally, where this blurring was apparent there also existed an enduring loyalty by daughters who were reluctant to implicate and "blame" mothers for the infliction of HBA. Mothers that were viewed in a favourable light by victims, despite evidence of contradicting and controlling behaviour by mothers, appeared to remain unblemished by the criminal justice system. Victims appear to constantly mitigate actions committed by mothers. The perception that mothers are secondary or indirect victims impacts on police decision making, with officers unlikely to categorise the mother as a 'perpetrator' or pursue formal action, especially when the mother is portrayed as having the victim's "best interests" at heart - and is therefore considered as 'more sinned against than sinning'. This tends to support Klockars' view, that the wishes of the complainant are the single most important influence on police selective enforcement practices (1985). Interview data findings support this contention, as a third of officers (5/15), had never investigated a female offender of HBA, despite being 'specialists' in this field. This may signify that uniformed officers are not bringing these incidents to specialist attention-because they have not recognised female perpetrators as 'criminal' nor logged them on crimes. Furthermore, the fact that victims do not want to prosecute parents may lead officers to circumvent crime recording practices. Even when there was direct evidence that mothers posed a risk to victims, police took no action, highlighting that victim wishes may be being 'used' by officers to legitimate police inaction. It is difficult to ascertain with real certainty whether police turn a blind eye to female perpetration as part of a larger set of non-enforcement practices; whether through lack of training officers fail to recognise female perpetration; or whether officers perceive the mother to be an "indirect victim" and therefore not 'culpable'. It is highly probable that all, to varying degrees, play some part in shaping the criminal justice response to HBA where female perpetration is concerned.

The intention of this article has been to challenge the stereotypical notion that women are 'victims' and men are 'perpetrators'. As indicated, there is evidence in the findings to suggest that men do perform a protective function in some cases. Professionals in the safeguarding arena (police, children's social care, health, education) must reconsider the role played by the mother, rather than assume that mothers are secondary victims who automatically protect their children. That mothers, at the very least turn a "blind eye" to HBA perpetration should encourage a re-evaluation of law enforcement and social services strategies, to avoid children and young women returning to, or remaining in, risk predicaments.

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